

LIONS AND SAILING SHIPS

Svyatoslav Sakharnov







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HOW THIS BOOK CAME ABOUT

It all happened on the island of Bering, not far from Kamchatka.

I was sitting drawing by the window in a little cottage on the seashore.

We were waiting for the motor ship, which was to arrive any minute and take us to the mainland.

I was sketching the little Aleutian boys who were catching flat fishes, plaice, with their hands in the shallow water, and Svyatoslav Sakharnov was packing his suitcase. He was cramming into it warm clothing, pots and pans, and boots, and was wondering what on earth he could do with his manuscripts.

"Oh, there's so many of them, a whole sackful," he lamented.

He tied up the different piles of papers, the stories about cunning sea fishes, about brave sailors, and about comical pirates... All these were stories that he had read to the children on the island at the school.

"And what if we publish these stories just as they are, altogether in one book?" he asked. "It doesn't matter that they're all different, does it? After all, they are packed in one suitcase, aren't they!"

We both started laughing.

On the horizon the white spot of the motor ship appeared.

So, that was how this book came about. It just happened by itself, from the different stories that my friend, the cheerful, untiring writer Svyatoslav Sakharnov, had made up or retold.

All I had to do was to draw the pictures for it. But that was quite interesting, too.

Mikhail Belomlinsky





TALES ABOUT LIONS AND SAILING SHIPS





THE SAILOR CALLED MR. STEAMER

Once upon a time in the famous city of Leningrad there lived a sailor called Mr. Steamer. He lived in the house at 7 Taurida Street. In his room stood an iron bedstead and on the wall hung a plate with lions drawn on it. There was also a table in the room on which there lay a sea shell and a ship's nail.

Every morning when the sailor woke up, he took the sea shell off the table and put it to his ear to listen whether he could hear the sea in it. One morning when he awoke, he picked up the sea shell and he did indeed hear the waves roaring inside it. "It's time to set sail!" thought the sailor. "It's time to build a new ship."

He picked up the nail off the table and stepped out into Taurida Street. He took forty steps and then turned into the Taurida Gardens. As he was walking through Taurida Gardens he met a stranger dressed in a striped sailor's shirt and carrying an umbrella. "It's the first time I've seen a sailor with an umbrella!" thought Mr. Steamer.

When they came up to each other, the stranger said, "Excuse me, can you tell me how to get to the sea, please?"

"I'm going that way myself," replied Mr. Steamer. "Come with me."

They walked along side by side.

"The doctors have told me to get some sea air," explained the man with the umbrella. "I'm not feeling too well at the moment. My appetite is poor, I have a bad cough and my knee makes a creaking noise when I walk. I keep being ill and don't even have any time to work."

"As a matter of fact," said Mr. Steamer, "I could use a sailor. I'm going to build a ship. We could sail the seas together."

"Oh, no!" said the man with the umbrella. "That's not for me."

Mr. Steamer got rather angry. "Why ever not?" he said. "What are you wearing a sailor's shirt for then? Are you a landlubber sailor?"

"That's right. I'm a landlubber. I just happened to buy the shirt."

Mr. Steamer felt like getting even more angry, when suddenly he saw a little chest on the path. It was a light blue chest with two handles.

"How did that chest get there?" said Mr. Steamer in surprise. "And whose is it?"

"It's probably nobody's," said the man with the umbrella. "Let's have a look what's inside it. May be it's medicines?"

"Well, see," said Mr. Steamer, thinking to himself, "what do I need medicines for? I could do with an electric iron to iron my sailor's trousers. It's time I stopped pressing them in the old-fashioned way, by putting them under the mattress at nights."

He pulled a penknife out of his pocket and inserted it under the lid. The lid opened with a loud creak, and there inside sat a ginger tom-cat with green eyes.

The cat jumped out of the chest and darted away. When the cat raced along the path, they followed it along the path. When the cat ran along the top of the fence, they ran along the top of the fence. Then the cat climbed a tree. Mr. Steamer reached up and bent the tree down to the ground and removed the cat from it.

They took the cat and put it back in the chest. They closed the lid and sat down for a rest.

"Phew, my knee hurts me," said the man with the umbrella. "I've started coughing again, too. I wonder what that cat's doing inside that chest. Let's have a look."

They opened the lid, but the cat was no longer there. Instead there was a monkey. The monkey jumped up, sprang out of the chest and took to its heels. They rushed after the monkey. The monkey ran under the bench and they followed it. When the monkey had a ride on the swings, they had a ride on the swings. Then the monkey hid under the roundabout. Mr. Steamer lifted up the roundabout and pulled out the monkey. They took it back, put it in the chest and closed the lid.

"Uph!" said the man with the umbrella. "Where did that monkey come from? There was a cat there before. Let's have another look, shall we?"

They raised the lid of the chest, and saw an iron, an electrical one with a cord.

"What an iron!" gasped Mr. Steamer. "That's the very thing for me to press my sailor's trousers with. I'll just take it home. Wait for me here, will you? What's your name by the way?"

"My name's Stepan Petrovich Sapozhkov, but my friends call me Sleep. I don't know why, but they do!"

"That's easy enough to understand. You're not very strong, that's why they call you Sleep."

Mr. Steamer tucked the little chest under his arm and waddled home. The landlubber sailor Sleep waited for him in the gardens. He walked up and down the path. Suddenly three lions came bounding towards him from round the bend in the path... But that's a different story...



THE LANDLUBBER SAILOR SLEEP AND THE LIONS

Do you remember that Mr. Steamer had a plate hanging on the wall on which lions were depicted? Well, the lions had become tired of hanging on the wall and climbed down from the plate to go for a walk in the city. When they entered the Taurida Gardens, they looked and saw a man standing there wearing a sailor's striped shirt and holding an umbrella.

"We'll have to attack that man," thought the lions, "perhaps even eat him. We're supposed to be beasts of prey after all."

They began to argue who would attack the man first.

"Not I!" said one of the lions. "Isn't it enough that I'm in front of everyone else on the plate and you're trying to push me to the front here as well. We should take it in turns."

"Only you can do it," said the other two lions. "What do you mean by taking it in turns, when you were the first on the plate? Look what nice sharp teeth you have."

Sleep heard all this. "Well, I never," he thought. "I'm going to have to get away from these lions!"

He turned round and ran out of the gardens. The lions followed him. They all ran as far as the Turukhtan Islands and then they were out of town.

Sleep espied a tent by the road, a tarpaulin tent with strings at its four corners, so he hid in the tent. The lions ran up to the tent and started sniffing around. "This is where he is!" they cried and tore the strings and the tarpaulin to pieces.

Sleep sprang out of the tent and ran on. He ran as far as the turn in the road where he saw a stone tower with an iron-work flag flying over it. He hurried into the tower, but the lions were there immediately, trying to break down the tower, the bricks and the iron flag flying on all sides.

Sleep jumped down from the tower and, as he was dashing away, he saw a door standing in the middle of the road. There were no walls and no house there, just a door. Sleep rushed through the door, slammed it behind him and held onto the handle. The lions ran up to the door and tried to open it. They pulled it towards themselves, and Sleep pulled it towards himself. This went on until the lions had no strength left, so they gave up and went away.

Sleep thought, "My, my, what a door. I must take it with me for the ship. Mr. Steamer will be pleased!"

He lifted the door on his shoulder and went on his way. Then he looked and saw a bucket in the road... But that's a different story altogether.

THE BUCKET AND THE TELESCOPE

As Sleep was walking along the road, carrying the door, he looked and saw a bucket. A brand-new one with a lid on it.

"The bucket will come in handy, too," thought Sleep, "to bail the water out. You can't have a ship without a bucket!"

He picked up the bucket and walked on.

The road had now turned towards the sea. Near the shore Sleep saw a coast guard training ship. Forty coast guards were washing their shirts on deck. They were spreading out the shirts, rubbing them with soap and scrubbing them with brushes. When they saw Sleep they shouted, "There's our bucket. We thought we'd lost it. Wait a minute, sir!"

Sleep became frightened and took to his heels. All he could hear was the wind whistling in his ears.

The coast guards shouted, "Stop!" But all he heard was "You-you-you!"

"We must stop that man," said the coast guards, "or no one knows where he'll run off to."



So, they all started chasing him. Sleep looked round to see them all running after him. He began to run even faster. He had the door on his shoulder, the umbrella under his arm and the bucket in his hand. Suddenly he saw an absolutely huge telescope lying by the roadside. "I'll hide in there," he thought. He crawled into the telescope, placed the bucket between his legs and the door beside him. Phew! That had been a close scrape.

When the coast guards ran up and saw the telescope, they exclaimed, "Don't let's bother about the man with the bucket any more. Perhaps he needs it. But we need this telescope. We can watch the coast through it and discover new lands."

They heaved the telescope onto their shoulders, but they were surprised how heavy it was.

It occurred to them that something might be inside it.

They tilted the telescope downwards, and Sleep rolled out with the bucket and the door and ran away.

The coast guards didn't bother to chase him. "Let him run if he wants to," they said. "Perhaps he's a famous sportsman. May be he's training."

Sleep ran and ran until he reached the city again and the Taurida Gardens where Mr. Steamer was already waiting for him.

"Well done!" exclaimed Mr. Steamer. "Thanks a lot for the door and the bucket. How's your knee?"

"Surprisingly enough," replied Sleep, "since I've been running it's stopped hurting. Perhaps I'll sail with you after all. May be the sea air will make my cough go, too. Only, no adventures, mind! The doctors have said I'm not to get overexcited."

"Adventures at sea!" said Mr. Steamer. "Sometimes there's a storm. Sometimes, somebody gets drowned, but that's all. There's never anything much to bother about. Shall we go then?"

They left the Taurida Gardens and walked along the bank of the river Neva.

"This is the spot," said Mr. Steamer.

They set about building their sailing ship... But that's another story.

THE SAILING SHIP AND THE SAILFISH

So, Mr. Steamer and Sleep started to build their sailing ship. They took the nail and drove it into a board. Then they nailed another board to that one and another and another. Soon the deck was ready. To the deck they added the



sides and the keel. Then they put up the mast and raised the sail.

"Where's the door? Don't forget the door!" said Sleep, rather worried.

They put the door on its hinges, right in the middle of the deck so that you could walk through it from the stern to the prow. They put rollers under the sailing ship and rolled it down to the Baltic Sea.

They rolled it along, but the ship was heavy. Luckily, the wind blew and filled the sails and the ship rolled along by itself.

So it was rolling along with Sleep running behind it and Mr. Steamer waddling along after him.

"I mustn't forget to buy today's paper," said Mr. Steamer. "There's so much going on in the world these days!"

He bought his newspaper. They launched the sailing ship in the Baltic Sea, boarded it and set sail.

"No adventures, mind!" repeated Sleep.

They saw a magnetic mountain rising out of the sea in front of them. No sooner had they sailed up to it, when all the nails sprang out of the ship, and it fell to pieces. Mr. Steamer and Sleep found themselves in the water. They began to pick up the boards. When they pulled the boards out onto the shore, they tied them together with string and sailed on.

They went a little further and saw a huge bird hovering over the sea in front of them. The bird flew up to the sailing ship, seized it in its talons, flew high above the sea and let go of it. The ship was smashed to smithereens as it hit the water. Once again Mr. Steamer and Sleep found themselves in the water. They swam about collecting up the pieces of their ship. When they had gathered them all up, they put the boat together again, and sailed on.

"Well, that seems to be the lot," said Mr. Steamer. "Now I can read my newspaper."

He lay down on the deck, opened his newspaper and read it. Sleep was steering the ship, holding his umbrella above his head with one hand and turning the helm with the other.

Sleep's back began to itch. He put down his umbrella and tried to scratch his back with his right hand, but he couldn't reach. Then he tried with his left, but he couldn't reach. He broke off a little splinter from the boat, and the boat sank.

Once again Mr. Steamer and Sleep found themselves in the water. They saw a sailfish swimming by and they managed to jump onto its back. The fish with its sail-like fin slewed about and swam on.

"It's a shame I didn't finish reading my newspaper," said Mr. Steamer. "There was such an interesting article in it. It says there are pirates roaming the seas again."

Mr. Steamer and Sleep noticed a ship coming towards them sporting a black sail. There were forty pirates on the deck... But that is another story...



THE FORTY PIRATES

The ship was sailing along with forty pirates on board. The pirates were sitting on deck sewing new buttons on their trousers. They had lost the old ones in a fight.

The pirates looked and saw the sailfish with two people on its back, one of them holding an umbrella. They were so surprised that they changed their ship's course and started chasing the fish. When they caught up with the fish, they took the two people off its back and dragged them onto the deck.

The two people were, of course, Mr. Steamer and the landlubber sailor Sleep.

"That's great," said the pirates. "It's a long time since we've had such a good catch—people astride a fish! Now, we'll put you to death in some awful way. Come on, mates, let's start."

Mr. Steamer and Sleep lay tied up on the deck, thinking that things weren't looking too good for them. The pirates came up to them brandishing bent knives. They were headed by Black Beard, the ship's captain and the keeper of the ship's plug.

"Hey, you there, you the stouter one," said Black Beard, "throw your friend overboard. Then we'll let you live."

"I'd do better to throw one of your lot overboard," replied Mr. Steamer. He jerked his hands and feet so sharply that the rope broke, and he jumped up ready to fight the pirates.

The pirates had two cannons on the ship, one in the stern and the other in the bows.

"Don't fire at them!" shouted Black Beard. "We must take them alive."

The first pirate leapt at Mr. Steamer, but Mr. Steamer grabbed his arm and threw him overboard. The second pirate flew at Mr. Steamer who caught his leg and flung him overboard, too. Then a third pirate sprang at Mr. Steamer. Mr. Steamer just gave him a look, and the pirate fell overboard by himself.

When the pirates saw that they could not overcome Mr. Steamer, they all gathered round the cannon in the stern, loaded it with an explosive bomb and prepared to fire it at Mr. Steamer.

While they were busy Mr. Steamer had been untying Sleep. Sleep noticed that there were very many buttons on the deck. He picked them up, put them into the second cannon and fired it at the pirates with such a bang that they were all blown overboard as if swept away by the wind. Only Black Beard was left on the ship.

"Oh, it's smashing that you've got rid of all of them," he said. "I'm really fed up with all those coarse fellows. They were such an ignorant lot. Not even one of them could play draughts."

Shall we have a game right now? The one who wins will be the captain. Then he can take the ship wherever he likes.”

Mr. Steamer and Sleep thought that Black Beard might in fact be a decent fellow and had only become a pirate as a result of some misfortune.

They sat down to play draughts. Mr. Steamer and Sleep played for a very long time, but neither of them got the upper hand of Black Beard. Suddenly they noticed that they were putting their draughts on the black squares and Black Beard was placing his on the white.

They changed round and immediately they won. Black Beard realised that things were not going well for him. He looked overboard and made out that he spotted something.

“You sit here,” he said. “I’ve got to go down into the hold and see to the plug so that the ship doesn’t take in too much water.”

Black Beard went down into the hold and pulled the plug right out. The ship began to sink and soon sank to the bottom. Mr. Steamer and Sleep again found themselves in the water, but this time the forty pirates were all there, too.

“Aha, now we’ve caught them!” said Black Beard. “Hold ’em, my hearties! I’m sick and tired of these two fellows. I’ve just won four games of draughts from them... But where are they?”

He looked round, but Mr. Steamer and Sleep were already far away for the sailfish had waited for them in the water.

The pirates swam and swam and swam. A motor launch passed them with forty coast guards on board on a training exercise. They had a doctor on board to keep a check on their health. The coast guards looked through the telescope and saw forty people in the water.

“Oh, what a terrible shame,” said the doctor. “Those people can catch cold!”

When the coast guards pulled them out of the water, they saw that the people were pirates.

“Well, what’s going to happen to you then?” asked the coast guards. “Shall we send you to prison or are you going to do an honest day’s work? Grow cabbages, for example?”

“We’ll grow cabbages!” shouted thirty-nine of the pirates.

“Prison for me!” said the unreformable Black Beard.

Meanwhile, the lions from which Sleep had escaped were walking along the road when they saw some hunters in a little clearing... But that is yet another story.





THE HUNTERS AND THE LIONS

The lions were marching along the road when suddenly they caught sight of some hunters sitting in a little clearing. There were a lot of hunters, forty of them. They had met according to their hunters' custom to discuss where all the ducks and hares that one used to find round Leningrad had gone.

The hunters looked and saw the lions. "My word," they thought, "it's a long time since we saw any lions around Leningrad. How does one hunt lions? It seems like we've forgotten. We'll have to discuss it."

The hunters began to decide how they could best catch the lions.

"I suggest we pour glue on the road. The lions will just stick to it."

"But what about the cars?" asked the others. "Won't they stick to the road, too. We'll get into trouble if we hunt like that."

Another hunter made a suggestion: "Here's a good idea. Let's build a fence round the city. The lions will be inside the fence so all we shall have to do is get them out."

But the others answered. "What about the people? They'll be inside, too, won't they? How shall we separate them from the lions? No, that's no good."

A third hunter said, "We must take the binoculars and look through them the wrong way. Then when we look at the lions they will be ever so tiny and we can just pick them up like caterpillars and put them into a box. Even a match box will do."

The hunters began to argue whether the lions would really get smaller if you looked at them with the binoculars the wrong way round.

The lions listened to all this and thought, "Well, it looks as if that's the end of us. What is this newfangled thing—binoculars? Lots of new devices evidently must have been invented while we were hanging on the wall."

The lion who had stood in front of the others on the plate said, "Why don't we go back to our plate? Which one of us is really a beast of prey? It's so nice and quiet back on the plate, isn't? I'm willing to take the lead."

The other two were all in favour of his suggestion. "Oh, yes, let's go back to the plate," they said.

By the time the hunters had stopped arguing, they looked and saw that the lions had gone. The lions returned to 7 Taurida Street, went up to the room and climbed back into their plate.

"It's not for us," they said, "being beasts of prey. We're not used to hunters any more. We're wondering where our owner, the sailor, has got to."

At that moment, Mr. Steamer and Sleep were riding on the back of the sailfish. So, they were riding along when suddenly a terrible sea monster, a ten-armed squid, appeared before them out of the depths... But that is, of course, another new story.



THE LIONS AND THE SAILING BOAT

Mr. Steamer and Sleep were riding along on the sailfish, Sleep with his umbrella tucked under his arm.

"Do you know what," he said. "I've stopped coughing. That's what fresh air does for you! Everything's fine. But don't let's have any more adventures!"

No sooner had he spoken than the water began to swell up, and a big frightening squid appeared in front of them. It had ten arms, a greedy crooked beak and eyes like two wheels.

The sailfish veered off to the side, but the squid followed it.

"I beg you to get off of me," said the fish. "Then I can dive down or the squid will eat me."

"Where can we get off?" asked Sleep. "There's only water all around us."

But the squid came closer and closer, sending out jets of water, lashing the water with its tail. It was just about to pounce on the sailfish.

"Things look bad," said Mr. Steamer. "If we only had a cannon or even a penknife."

"Yes," said Sleep, "it looks as if it's the end of us this time. Phew! How hot it is! I'll put my umbrella up."

Sleep put his umbrella up. It was the first time in its life that the squid had seen an umbrella. Its eyes opened so wide they became quite round and its break fell open, so that the squid became full of water and sank to the bottom in its amazement.

"It's actually drowning!" said Sleep. "Perhaps we should try to save it."

"It will be all right, you'll see," said Mr. Steamer.

They swam on and saw three black spots in front of them.

"What can it be?" asked Sleep. "It looks like stones, but it isn't... It looks like sharks but it can't be... It's lions!"

Sure enough, three sea lions were swimming towards them. They were black and shiny with flippers like wings and teeth sharper than nails. The sailfish tried to escape from them, but the sea lions started to chase it. The fish saw that it couldn't get away.

"You can do what you like," it said, "but this time I'm going under."

Mr. Steamer said, "Just a minute!"

The sea lions surrounded the sailfish on all sides.

"Yes, we can't get away from them this time," said Mr. Steamer. "These are clever animals. They won't be taken in by an umbrella."

"Perhaps we could try?" asked Sleep. "Or perhaps we ought to shoo them away?"

"It's too late now," said Mr. Steamer. "Even my strength won't help us here."

“Oh, yes,” said Sleep, “but I think I recognise these sea lions. Where have I seen them before? Was it at the zoo? No, not at the zoo. Was it in a museum? No, not in a museum. I remember now. Did you by any chance work at the circus by the river Fontanka?”

“Of course, we did,” replied the sea lions. “We worked there for three seasons. We’ve got good memories. Our number was called ‘The Magic Chest’. It was a blue chest with handles on it. We could get anything we liked out of it, anything the audience asked us for.”

“Now I see,” said Sleep to Mr. Steamer. “Do you remember the Taurida Gardens? Before you thought about the iron, a cat and a monkey crossed my mind.”

“It was a good number,” said the sea lions, “but the new director didn’t like it. He ordered the circus folk to throw the chest away and let us out into the sea. There were many more things we could do as well!”

The sea lions began to show them different tricks. One turned somersaults forward, one backwards, and the third took Sleep’s umbrella, and, standing on its tail, walked around the fish, holding the umbrella.

“Phew!” said the fish. “I’m tired of you. You make me feel dizzy. Some fine passengers I’ve got here, too! I beg you to let me go!”

“Go on then, dive down,” said Mr. Steamer. “The sea lions will take us to the shore now.”

They sat on the sea lions and rode on. Mr. Steamer and Sleep reached the shore, said goodbye to the sea lions and made them promise that if they were to perform at the circus again, they would definitely tell them. Then they went into the city of Leningrad.

As they were walking along they came to a house by the road where all the doors and windows were wide open, and all round the house there were cabbages growing... But that’s yet another story.





THE TELESCOPE AND THE SHIP'S NAIL

As Mr. Steamer and Sleep were hurrying along the road towards Leningrad, they saw a house by the road in a garden of cabbages. They entered the house. In the first room stood a table and round the table there were 39 stools. They went into the second room and there stood 39 beds.

They had just sat down on a bed, when a door opened and the 39 pirates came in. Mr. Steamer and Sleep jumped up. "Surely we haven't got to fight again," they thought.

But the pirates said, "Sit down, have a seat. We're peace-loving now. We've changed our ways. Only Black Beard couldn't be reformed. Would you like something to eat?"

They gave Mr. Steamer and Sleep some cabbage cutlets to eat and then left the house with them. There were 39 spades lying about round the house. The pirates quietly picked up the spades, said goodbye to Mr. Steamer and Sleep and went back to their cabbages.

Mr. Steamer and Sleep continued on until they saw a piece of string lying on the road. One end had been made into a loop, and the other was lying in the bushes. They had only just stepped inside the loop, when someone in the bushes pulled the string. Mr. Steamer and Sleep fell down on the asphalt, and out of the bushes there climbed none other than Black Beard himself.

"Ah!" he said. "You didn't expect to meet me here, did you? Now I've got you. Now I'll finish you off!"

He tied the string to a tree.

"I haven't tortured anyone for a long time," he said. "Just imagine it, there's no amusements in prison. I hardly managed to escape."

"Perhaps we could play draughts?" proposed Sleep. "The one who loses can be tortured."

"Oh, no," answered Black Beard. "We've played draughts already."

Black Beard started to build a bonfire.

"We'll have to tear the string," thought Mr. Steamer. "I'll make mince meat out of that Black Beard now!"

These thoughts had only just passed through his mind, when he spotted a detachment of coast guards marching up the road with a telescope on their shoulders. Black Beard caught sight of them and took to his heels. The coast guards put the telescope down and ran after him. Before you could bat an eyelid, they had surrounded him.

"Well done!" said Mr. Steamer. "You were just in the nick of time. Otherwise, I'd have made a cabbage pancake out of him. Where are you off to with that telescope?"

"To the city," replied the coast guards. "We're tired of carrying it around."

It will be better if we give it to the scientists to examine the moon through it. We know you. You're the sailor called Mr. Steamer."

"Everyone knows me," said the sailor. "And this is my friend Sleep."

"You can call me Styopa or Sapozhkov," Sleep told the coast guards. "I was the one who took your bucket. Do you remember?"

"Of course, we do," they answered. "By the way, where is it?"

"It sank together with the ship, it's gone to the bottom. It was an accident, you know."

"Never mind," said the coast guards. "We've got plenty of buckets. Well, we'll be off then!"

"Take me with you," said Black Beard. "Or else I shall get mixed up in some other crime. Give me something to carry, maybe some small magnifying glass, please."

"That's right. Give him the lens out of the telescope to carry," said Mr. Steamer. "Perhaps he'll change his ways."

"All right," said the coast guards.

They gave Black Beard the smallest lens to carry, lifted the telescope onto their shoulders and marched away with it.

The coast guards marched on and Black Beard went with them, carrying his lens. Mr. Steamer and Sleep returned to the famous town of Leningrad without any more adventures. Soon they reached 7 Taurida Street.

"Well, I'm going home," said Sleep. "I've never felt better. My knee doesn't hurt me any more and I've stopped coughing. That's what the sea air does for you. The doctors will be pleased."

"And I'll go and iron my sailor's trousers," said Mr. Steamer.

They said goodbye to one another. Mr. Steamer went home and looked round the room. Everything seemed to be in its place. The table, the iron bedstead, and the plate. The lions were on the plate, too. The sea shell lay on the table.

"I feel so tired!" thought Mr. Steamer. "I must be getting old. I'm tired of adventures. In actual fact, what do I need these shipwrecks for? I'll become a landlubber sailor. I'll get some good nights' sleep instead of all these ups and downs."

Mr. Steamer lay down and slept for exactly three days and three nights. He woke up, and someone was knocking at the door. Knock, knock, knock.

Mr. Steamer opened the door and there stood Stepan Petrovich Sapozhkov in a sailor's shirt, but without his umbrella.

"Do you know what's happened?" he said. "I can't do without the sea now. Let's go and build a new ship. We'll sail the high seas... By the way, what's that noise?"

Mr. Steamer picked up the shell from the table and held it to his ear. The sound of waves was coming from the shell. It was calling the sailor to sea.



“Well, why not?” answered Mr. Steamer. “There’s nothing like the sea! Only I haven’t got a nail now... And I haven’t ironed my trousers either.”

He opened the chest and there, instead of an iron, lay a nail.

“Just the very job!” said Mr. Steamer.

He borrowed an iron from a neighbour, pressed his sailor’s trousers and picked up the nail.

“Shall we build a sailing ship?” he asked.

“Yes, a sailing ship,” replied Sleep.

So, they went down to the bank of the Neva, built a ship, and sailed out into the Baltic See again.





TALES ABOUT THE SEA





HOW THE CRAB GAVE THE WHALE A HELPING HAND

One day a whale was catching small fry.

The little fishes swim in the ocean in huge shoals, so all the whale has to do is to come up to them quickly with his mouth open. Then snap go his jaws, and he has a mouthful of small fry. Once his mouth is closed, he strains the water back into the sea through his whiskers, and all the little fishes go down his throat. For the whale has a very small throat really.

The little fishes went racing towards the shore with the whale following them.

The whale rushed after them without looking where he was going and suddenly he found himself on the beach.

It's a good thing a whale is an animal and not a fish, so he won't die out of the water.

There he lay on the sand like a huge black rock, unable to move backwards or forwards. He sighed deeply for he knew that now he must wait for high tide.

But then some hungry wolves came running along the beach, looking for something to eat. Suddenly they espied a mountain of meat. And it was hardly moving either.

The wolves ran up to the whale, wondering which side to begin with.



A crab was watching all this from under the water.

"Well, that's the end of the whale! I must help out a fellow sea creature," thought the crab, crawling onto the beach.

"Wait," shouted the crab. "Wait, and I'll join you. There's enough whale for all of us. But the time's not right yet."

The wolves stopped in their tracks.

"What d'you mean 'not right'?" asked the wolves.

"You mean you don't know?" asked the crab surprised.

"Surely you must know that you're only supposed to eat whales by moonlight. The higher the moon is, the better they taste!"

The wolves were surprised, but they didn't dare to argue with the crab. For the crab lives in the sea like the whale. He, goggle-eyed creature that he was, probably knew best.

The wolves sat down on the beach around the whale and raised their muzzles towards the sky to watch for the moon.

It was already evening so they wouldn't have long to wait for the moon.

The whale just lay there and sighed.

Then the moon peeped from behind the cliffs and crept up into the sky.

The wolves sat, their eyes fixed on the whale. They had not noticed that the seawater was creeping up the beach. They just snapped their teeth with hunger, waiting for the crab to say it was time to start eating.

The crab did not budge, only stroked his sides from time to time with his claws.

Suddenly the wolves felt that they were sitting on something wet. They ran back towards the cliff, but did not take their eyes off the whale even for a moment. The moon was now high in the sky above the wolves' heads.

The whale also felt the water under him. He sighed, breathed in deeply, filling the chest with air, and then he lashed his tail. The water splashed everywhere. The wolves scattered. The whale stirred up a foam in the water with his tail and sent the waves crashing towards the wolves. The wolves rushed up the cliffs.

The whale turned his head towards the sea, churned up the water with his mighty tail and off he went, off into the sea. Once he got into deeper water, he took in plenty of air and disappeared altogether. You could only see his tail-end.

And, walking sideways as crabs usually do, the crab slipped quietly into the sea, after him.

By the time the wolves realised what had happened, both the whale and the crab had gone. They sat on the beach for a long time, either looking up at the moon or gazing down at the sea. It was all quite beyond them, mere landlubbers. How could they possibly know about the tides?

No one ever told them that the higher the moon is the further the tide comes in.

THE SHIP'S FLY AND THE SPRINKLER FISH

A fly once lived on a ship.

More than anything else in the world the fly liked to give people advice.

When the sailors were pulling up the rope, the fly was always there. "L-l-look l-l-lively! I-i-in o-o-one g-g-go!" she would hum.

She would go on buzzing until the sailors drove her away.

The fly flew into the ship's kitchen, the galley. There the ship's cook, all dressed in white, was making some stewed fruit.

The fly sat down on a shelf next to the salt-cellar, and began to hum, "S-s-sultanas! Y-y-you've f-f-forgotten the s-s-sultanas! Wh-wh-what a sh-sh-shame!"



The cook had added the sultanas a long time ago. He put up with the fly's teasing until he couldn't bear it any longer. Then he flicked at the fly with the towel. He missed the fly, but he knocked the salt off the shelf—right into the stewed fruit!

The fly was out of the kitchen like a shot.

On deck the fly saw the ship's dog trying to catch his own tail.

The fly flew up to him and hummed, "B-b-behind you, sc-sc-scatter-brain, b-b-behind you. U-u-use y-y-your t-t-teeth, t-t-teeth!"

The dog dashed at the fly. He missed her and—plop—he went overboard. The sailors hardly managed to pull the dog out of the water.

The fly had wisely hidden herself in a crack.



There was no way they could get rid of her.

The ship sailed to a hot country where it dropped anchor. The fly crept out of the crack, "I-i-it's h-h-hot! I-i-it's s-s-sultry!"

She sat on the deck in the shade, looking into the water. Suddenly she saw a tubby fish swimming out of the deep. The fish had a greyish-green back and yellow stripes along his sides.

The fly wanted to give the fish some advice how to swim better. But she didn't have time, for the fish filled his mouth with water and spurted it at the fly.

The water knocked her right off the deck. She fell head over heels into the sea. While she was still in the air, she managed to buzz, "H-how h-h-horrible!"

It wasn't clear what exactly was horrible. The sprinkler fish snapped his jaws and that was the end of the ship's fly.

THE SHRIMP AND THE THREE SEA URCHINS

A shrimp was swimming between the stones, nibbling at the green weeds. The shrimp was a very small bearded crayfish, which swam like a fish and jumped like a flea. All he needed to do was to flick his tail and he was gone.

He was swimming along, but all he could think of was "How can I make sure I don't miss the tide going out!"

He looked all around him but everything seemed to be all right.

A big-eyed bullhead lay on top of the silt, scanning the neighbourhood for some prey. The little balanus crayfish was sleeping in his den with just his whiskers showing. He had a really nice little house in a lime bottle with a lid. Another crayfish, a hermit crayfish, was wandering about on the bottom, carrying his house with him. He had actually stolen his house for it was an empty snail's shell.

No one seemed in a hurry to leave, so there was probably still plenty of time before the tide was due to go out.

Suddenly the shrimp espied three brown balls on the seabed. There was something familiar about them, but he couldn't quite remember what. So, he swam towards them to take a closer look.



Just as the shrimp was coming up to them, prickles stood up all over the balls. The shrimp jumped back. Suddenly the balls stirred and began to crawl along the bottom. They looked so funny creeping along. Between their spines they put out little yellow sucker-like legs. The little leg stretched out in front of them, gripped onto a stone, and then pulled the ball forward. Then another little leg did the same.

“Bah, it’s only sea urchins. How come I didn’t recognise them before,” thought the shrimp.

He cheered up, flicked his tail and began jumping around the sea urchins.

“I mustn’t forget to go back into the sea before the tide goes out,” he thought for a moment, but then forgot all about it again.

The sea urchins crept over the stones, leaving three trails behind them. They ate green weeds from the stones just as if they were scraping it off with a knife. They climbed onto a big flat rock and were busying themselves on the very top of it.

The shrimp took a closer look at what they were doing, but he jumped back in horror, for the sea urchins were even gnawing the stone. One of them has raised himself slightly and you could see his mouth underneath him with five little white teeth in it. The prickly sea urchins were scraping the stone with their teeth without making a sound. Each of them dug out a little hole in the stone for himself and settled down in it. Then they opened their spines wide and began to spin round and round, as if boring into the stone.

“They must be mad!” the shrimp decided. “Fancy digging holes in stones!”

The sea urchins gradually disappeared into the stone as if they were sinking.



It was a soft rock, a shell rock. The thin walls between the burrows broke down so that the sea urchins found themselves sharing the same hole.

"They've got all those spines and yet they hide in a rock. How silly they must be!" thought the shrimp.

Suddenly he realised that there was no water round him. He'd missed the tide going out. He shuddered with fright and trying to find somewhere to take refuge, he jumped from one rock to another, gasping for breath.

"It looks like the end of me," thought the shrimp.

Just as his strength was fading completely, he leapt up and turned right over. Plop! He fell into a hole with water in it. When he recovered his breath, he saw that there were spines sticking out all around him. He'd fallen right into the sea urchins' hole. Now, he understood how clever they had been when they bored the hole, for they no longer needed to be afraid of low tide.

"But what about the other sea creatures?" the shrimp recalled. He put his head out of the hole. "I dare say they've all died, haven't they?"

But it didn't look like that at all!

The bullhead had buried himself in the wet silt, and only his tail was left sticking out. The balanus had hidden himself in his bottle-den, closing the lid tight behind him. The hermit crab had crawled into his shell and stopped up the entrance into the shell with a claw just as if it had been a cork.

Each and every one of them had his own emergency supply of water. The bullhead had his in the silt, the balanus in his bottle, and the hermit crab in his shell.

They had all made themselves comfortable and were waiting for high tide.



THE NOSY NAVAGAS

On dry land they say that curiosity killed the cat. But this is what happened to some nosy creatures in the sea.

Four navagas once lived in the sea. They had white sides and green backs. They were no different from any other fish, except that they were always inquisitive, in fact just too nosy for words.

If the crabs got into a fight somewhere or the fishes had an argument, the navagas were always there sticking their noses in. They would swim up one after the other, nosing around to see who had broken off whose leg or who had outwitted whom.

One fine day as the navagas were swimming along, one of them espied a starfish creeping along the seabed. The starfish was blue-coloured with little yellow spots on it. It had a hump on its back, and its five arms were stretched out on all sides.

It grips onto the bottom of the sea with its sucker-like legs and pulls itself along in a straight line over stones and sand.

"I wonder where she's going," thought one of the navagas.

No sooner had she thought about it than her three little friends came along, too, swimming one after the other. The four of them got together and began to watch the starfish. The starfish crept behind a huge stone where she found half a flounder and came to a halt.

"I know," whispered the first navaga, "that flounder has been there for two days now. Eight crabs were eating it yesterday, but there's still half of it left."

"Just imagine it!" said the second navaga. "It was more than eight crabs could chew, and she wants it all for herself."

"What a greedy thing she is!" added the third navaga.

"What can she be thinking about?" asked the fourth navaga. "She's got such a little tiny mouth."

"She'll either choke herself or she'll burst," the navagas decided.

While they had been talking about the greedy starfish, it had moved up to the dead fish sideways.

The starfish's mouth was underneath her body, right in the middle of her stomach. How on earth was she going to eat the flounder?

The starfish clung sideways onto the flounder, opened her mouth and began to blow a sort of orange bubble out of it.

Was it her tongue?

No, of course not. Starfishes don't have tongues.

What could it be then?

The bubble grew bigger and bigger. It was just as if the starfish was turning



itself right inside out.

She covered the flounder with the bubble, wrapping it round it on all sides, and then she kept quite still.

She just lay there silently. It was really a frightening sight.

Suddenly the navagas realised that the orange bubble was the starfish's stomach, and that that was her way of swallowing the flounder and eating it.

The navagas began to make a fuss.

"How horrible she is!" said the first navaga.

"She's swallowed the flounder without even putting it into her mouth!" exclaimed the second navaga in amazement.

"Yes, she's played some kind of trick. Indeed, she's gone all topsy-turvy!" the third navaga was astounded.

"Ug-gh!" shuddered the fourth navaga.

A humpback salmon with a wide back and a sharp tooth who was swimming by heard the noise the navagas were making. It raced towards them with its mouth open and swallowed all four of them in one gulp. It was as simple as that, no tricks needed.

Then it swam away...

Ever since the fishes in the sea don't hang around in groups doing nothing, making a racket and staring at the sea's marvels.

The sea creatures keep themselves to themselves and don't mind each other's business any more.

THE GURNARD OR TRIGLA FISH

There was a rumour going round under the sea that a new fish had appeared in the neighbourhood.

All the sea creatures got together and talked about it. Then they decided to send the gilthead to have a look at this newcomer. Let the gilthead learn all about it and come back and tell us, they said. If the fish is worth looking at, we'll all go and have a look, and, if not, we won't waste our time, and that will be that.

The gilthead did not need to be told twice. His fins moving back and forth like lightning, he raced to the new fish and hurried back to the other fishes to tell them about it. "I found it. It was by the sand spit. I saw it with my own eyes. And what a fish! It has a brown back and a yellow belly. Its fins are like wings, dark blue and gold. And do you know what kind of eyes it's got?"



“Black?”

“What! You’ll never guess. Blue!”

The gilthead twirled round with pleasure. Blue eyes—that was a piece of splendid news, wasn’t it?

“Blue? Are you quite sure, old chap!” said the sea horse doubtfully.

“May my tail wither away, if I’m telling a lie!” said the gilthead, swearing it was the truth. “Stay here, and I’ll go and have another look.”

Off he went again. When he returned he had his tongue to one side.

“It’s amazing!” he said. “Whether you believe it or not, it’s up to you. I had just swum up to the fish when I went down onto the seabed. Suddenly it let out six crooked spines from under its head, dug them into the bottom and then walked along as if on stilts. It went along, feeling the sand for worms. When it found one, it gulped it down...”

The sea creatures became very angry with the gilthead. "Who ever saw a fish walking along the seabed?" they asked.

"We're sending you for the last time," they told him. "Hurry up and tell us all about it again. If you dare tell us anymore lies, you'll really have to face the music."

The gilthead rushed away.

They waited and waited for him to come back, but the mischievous creature was nowhere to be seen. The fishes had just decided to go and fetch him when they saw him coming towards them. He was dishevelled and all covered in sand. His mouth was open, he couldn't wait to tell them all about it.

"Listen, listen to me," he shouted.

He recovered his breath and began recounting his adventures.

"I swam up to the fish," he said, "it was walking along the bottom, and I followed it. Suddenly we saw a net in front of us. It was a huge net like a wall. The fishermen caught us in their net and dragged us out onto the beach. Well, I thought, that was the end of me. But the fishermen didn't even look at me. They espied the new fish and rushed towards it. They were just about to seize it, when it blew itself up like a balloon. It raised its fins as if they had been lids and grunted loudly 'Zz-grr! Zz-grr!' So, the fishermen took fright and ran away. Now the fish beat her tail on the sand and jumped back into the water. And I followed her too. That's just how it happened!"

The fishes were amazed. "But what kind of tail has she got?" they asked.

"An ordinary tail," answered the gilthead, "looks more like a spade." He could see that he had not convinced them that he was telling the truth.

"Oh, yes," he said, "and it had a little black spot in the middle!"

If he even noticed the little black spot he must have seen it, thought the sea creatures.

They all set off to introduce themselves to the stranger. She said she was called a gurnard or trigla. They examined her carefully. The gilthead had been right. Her back was brown and her belly yellow, and her fins were dark blue and gold. As for her eyes, they were indeed blue.

But what about the spines? Were there any spines? The gurnard walked on them to show the sea creatures how they worked. So, that was true, too.

But what about its voice?

Oh, the gurnard had a voice all right. She screeched and squealed and grunted so that they all jumped back.

The gilthead had been right about that, too.

And the tail was just as he had described it, an ordinary spade-shaped tail... But as for the little black spot—there was none.

The fishes and the crabs were delighted to have caught out the gilthead. They seized him and gave him a thrashing. It serves you right for telling lies! Don't you ever dare lie to us again!

Why on earth had he thought up that little spot in the heat of the moment?

It was such a little lie—but a black spot on the pure cloak of truth just the same.

HOW THE GILTHEAD LEARNED TO SWIM BACKWARDS

The gilthead has innumerable enemies in the sea. He is constantly rushing backwards and forwards, trying not to get caught in somebody's jaws.

One day the gilthead had a bright idea. He would learn to swim backwards.

"I'll learn to go backwards," he thought, "and then no one can catch me, if I know anything about it. I won't have to turn round so I can get away from any foe. But where can I find a fish who can teach me to swim backwards?"

The gilthead had heard that a sea horse who lived nearby swam in a different way from other fishes.

He immediately started to look for the sea horse. Aha! There it was, a little horse-like head peeping out of the seaweed. The sea horse had a tousled mane and a pipe-shaped nose. "Some fish, my foot," the gilthead thought.

"Hey, you there," shouted the gilthead, "come out, horse head. I need to talk to you."





The seaweed swayed, and the little fish swam out of it. He swam upright, his chest forwards and his tail tightly curled up.

"What do you want of me?" asked the sea horse.

The gilthead told him.

"No," said the sea horse, "I only know how to swim with my head up. Go and see the plaice. They say she has her own way of swimming. Perhaps she swims backwards?"

The gilthead started looking for the plaice. He wandered onto a sandbank, examining the orange sand as he swam along. A little water crab was scurrying to and fro right under his very nose.

Suddenly some kind of fish jumped up out of the sand. She seized the crab and sank back to the bottom. She was swimming sideways, fluttering like a rag.

The gilthead followed her.

"Are you the plaice by any chance?" he asked.

"I am," she answered. Then she lay down on the bottom again and began to throw sand onto herself with her fins. She was soon buried completely, only her eyes showed.



“Oh, you’ve got a nifty way of swimming,” said the gilthead. “But can you swim backwards?”

“No,” answered the plaice, “I can’t. But I have heard that far away to the south, in some warm rivers there live the leaf-fish and the sinodont fish. They say that they can swim in all different ways.”

There was nothing else for it but to set out for the south. So, the gilthead started out for the other side of the ocean in search of the rivers where these wondrous fishes live. He searched for a long time. One day, when he was wandering about in a warm river, he saw a leaf coming towards him, a brown leaf with dark veins on it, swimming blade up, stalk down.

The gilthead was rather hungry. “I’ll just take a bite,” he thought. He dashed towards the leaf, but it shot away sideways.

It was really a fish, swimming in the water with its head down, some kind of shred hanging from its chin.

“Well, I never,” said the gilthead. “So, there you are, leaf fish! Come on, show me how to swim backwards!”

“What makes you think that I can swim backwards?” answered the fish in surprise. “I can only swim like this, with my head down. Don’t get in my way.

You can see I'm trying to catch that little fish over there." The leaf fish swam on.

So, the gilthead had to look for the sinodont fish. By that time he was completely worn out, thin as a rake, and hardly able to move his tail.

"I'll just look in one more river," he thought, "and then I'll go home!"

He went into the river and saw a strange fish swimming towards him. All fishes have dark backs and light bellies, but this one had it the other way round. The gilthead swam up to the fish.

"Do you know what the sinodont fish is like?" he asked.

"Of course I do. I'm the sinodont fish!"

The gilthead was so glad to have found the sinodont fish that he bobbed up and down with joy.

"Oh, do teach me to swim backwards, quickly," he begged the sinodont fish.

The sinodont fish grinned, turned over on his back and said, "I can teach you to swim like this, on your back. But yours is not the right colour for that really. You know yourself that we have dark backs so that the birds don't spot them in the water so easily. And as for going backwards, as long as I have lived on this earth I have never heard of anyone swimming backwards. I'm sure there are no fish that can swim like that."

The gilthead grew sad, turned round and set off on the journey homeward. He swam out of the river into the sea. When he was swimming between the branches of coral, he suddenly bumped into a fish swimming very very slowly backwards. The gilthead caught his breath.

The fish went backwards as if that was the most normal way to swim. It was a broad fish covered with a yellow and brown pattern, and his teeth were like little bristles. A dark strip ran across his head from top to bottom, making it impossible to see his eyes. But to make up for it, he had a black spot on each side of his tail which looked just like eyes. So the fish swam along with these huge spots on his tail looking just like eyes and you would never have thought it was really going backwards.

The gilthead introduced himself to the fish who was in fact a four-eyed butterfly fish, a relative of the banded sea perch.

"Oh, all right," said the fish, "I'll teach you to swim backwards. Just watch me!"

The four-eyed butterfly fish put his tail straight, pushed the water away from him with his fins and moved backwards. Then it did it again and again.

The gilthead just wanted to try, too, when a little shark shot out from somewhere at the side. The shark went straight for the four-eyed butterfly fish, but missed him because it couldn't make out where his head and his tail were.

The gilthead took to his heels. He rushed away, racing from bush to bush.

When he looked round he saw the four-eyed butterfly fish flying after him, head first, boring through the water with his tail.

They both slipped behind a stone and recovered their breath. Then the gilthead asked the four-eyed butterfly fish, "Why on earth didn't you swim backwards?"

The four-eyed butterfly fish replied, "You must be joking! Just try and get away from a shark swimming backwards! I want to live a bit longer... Well, shall I go on teaching you, or not?"

"No, you needn't," said the gilthead. "I know how to get away swimming forwards. Goodbye and good luck!"

So, the gilthead swam home. He never learnt to swim backwards, but he is at least all in one piece.

He can do a bunk whenever he needs to; swimming forwards, that is.

THE SWINDLER CRAYFISH

It all happened long, long ago. The crayfishes met in council to decide who should live where. Those who were bigger went to live in the sea, and those who were smaller, in the rivers.

Only the smallest little crayfish remained. He was green in colour with one claw bigger than the other. His tail and his belly were soft and weak. Although he was very small in size, he was extremely cunning.

"It's probably better where the big ones have gone," he thought, and went to live in the sea.

After some time had passed, the little crayfish realised that things weren't so good in the sea after all. There were large numbers of all kinds of praying fish in the sea with sharp teeth. Any minute a bullhead might eat him or a crab break him in two with its claws.

There was really no time to enjoy life in the sea!

The crayfish crept under a stone. Now and then, he would nip out for a minute, seize a blade of seaweed or a worm and hurry back under the stone again.

One day he saw a snail crawling by. It was all right for the snail for she had a shell on her back. As soon as she smelt danger, she simply hid in it. She always carried her shell-home about with her.

"If only I could have one, too," thought the crayfish.

The crayfish only had a very small head, too small to invent something good, but big enough to think up a cunning trick.

"Hello, neighbour!" said the crayfish. "Crawl out of your house and let's have a chat."

"I've no time for that," answered the snail. "Can't you see I'm in a hurry. My sisters are waiting for me. I can't leave my home anyway, because I grow up with it!"

And she crawled on. Towards evening she hid herself behind the nearest stones.

"Oh, you worthless, brainless creature," said the crayfish irritably. "Just you wait, I'll get your shell off you somehow or other!"

A year passed, and the crayfish and the snail met again by his stone.

"Where have you been all this time?" asked the crayfish. "Sit down and have a rest. You must be tired of dragging your house around on your back with you. I've got something for you. Come out of your shell and I'll show you."

The crayfish was only deceiving the snail, for he had nothing at all really, except for his two green barbs which he put a great store by.

"But I don't need anything," said the snail. "I could do with a claw like you've got, of course, because it's not very easy without hands."

"Actually, I do have a spare claw under my stone," said the little crayfish joyfully. "Just follow me!"

But the snail did not believe him, for she had never seen a claw lying under the stone without the crayfish.

Suddenly a scorpion fish swooped down on them from somewhere. It wanted to swallow the crayfish whole, but it missed the crayfish and just caught his claw with its teeth and broke it off.

The crayfish dashed under his stone. He just managed to escape in the nick of time. The snail hid in her shell.

When the scorpion fish had gone, the snail crawled away.

Another year went by. The crayfish's claw grew again.

The crayfish happened to bump into the snail for the third time. The snail saw the crayfish's new claw.

"Where did you get that from?" she asked.

"Well," thought the crayfish, "now I'll cheat you out of your shell."

"What do you mean, where did I get it from? I told you I had a spare one under the stone. I've got another spare one there now."

"Oh, let me have it," begged the snail.

"I need it myself... Well, all right then, I'll let you have it. Follow me."

The crayfish crawled under the stone. The snail poked her head in after him, but she couldn't go any farther because of her shell. She was hardly able to pull it off her back. She shivered and huddled up because it felt so strange without her shell, and then she hurried to crawl under the stone. The crayfish



crawled under the stone on one side and slipped out on the other. He walked round the stone and there he was beside the shell. He pushed his tail and belly into it, with his claws and whiskers poking out. Meanwhile the snail had been searching all over the place under the stone, but she had found nothing.

When she crawled out from under the stone, she saw the crayfish running away along the seabed with her shell on his back. So the poor snail was left without her shell. The scorpion fish ate her that very same day.

Ever since the little crayfish has always carried a shell. He hides in it, all alone just like a hermit. This is why he is called the hermit crab.

When children happen to catch him in the water, they shout, "There's the swindler crab, the swindler crab!"

And he is truly a swindler, for he cheated the snail out of her shell.

THE LITTLE GREEN FISH

One day in the Black Sea the mullet, the haddock, and the sturgeon had an argument who was the strongest of them. They argued and argued and at last they decided that whoever of them could hold out longest among the rocks when the breakers were crashing in, was the strongest of them.

They chose some rocks near the shore, waited for some fresh, breezy weather, and then began to test their strength.

The first to swim to the rocks was the mullet. It swam, playing with its silvery tail. But as soon as it got near the shore the waves began to throw it backwards and forwards, and it realised that it would have difficulty in holding out.

It twisted its tail, arched its body, but it could not stand up to the waves. No matter how hard it tried to push itself forward, the water kept dragging it back. It became frightened and swam back without having reached the rocks.

Then the big-headed haddock swam towards the rocks. It got up speed and went right up to the very breakers. It hid between the rocks in the quiet water, but as soon as a wave came it hurled the haddock up against the rocks, then turned it over and dragged it out to sea.

The fish were frightened when they saw the haddock, its gills full of sand and the spines on its back all broken.

But the sturgeon did not turn a hair. "Oh, you're all small fry," she said. "You just watch how I can stand up to the waves."

So she swam forward. All the fishes quietened down. Even the mischievous little gilthead stopped for a moment to watch how the sturgeon would manage to stand up to the waves. Soon her back with the bony lumps on it could be seen near the rocks. The sturgeon was roving with her fins and tail, keeping herself in one place.

Two waves came crashing in one after the other, but the sturgeon did not move. These were followed by a third breaker, even higher, which lifted the sturgeon right up, turned her over and dragged her along the rocks on her side with her tail forwards. The wave carried the sturgeon out to sea.

The fishes decided that no one in the sea could cope with the waves, if such strong fishes had not been able to stand up to them.

Suddenly a little green fish swam out from somewhere or other. Perhaps it was a little eelpout, perhaps, a gudgeon. It was small for a gudgeon and it had a round head like that of an eelpout, it had no scales, and its back was green with brown spots on it.

"Let me have a try," said the little fish quietly.

The fishes grinned. "What makes you think you can do it, you little good-for-nothing! Don't you see who's already tried? Why are you poking your nose into other fishes business?"

The little fish didn't say a word. It lashed its tail and swam towards the rocks. It swam forwards, but the waves dragged it back as they rolled back. Twice the little fish tried to reach the rocks without managing it.

The fishes laughed even more than before. The sea horses laughed so much that they rolled up their tails and turned over and over in the seaweed.

The little fish swam forward a third time. It found a moment between two waves and did in fact manage to reach to the rocks. It swam up to a big rock and lay on it on its belly.



“Oh, what a clever creature, it’s actually managed to reach the rocks!” the fishes exclaimed. “But that doesn’t mean it can stay there. A wave will come in a minute and wash it away. It’ll be thrown up on the beach,” said the fishes.

Then a wave came. The green mountain of water surged over the rock, and crashed down on the shore. It broke into foam, swirled, turned and slid away down the beach.

All the fishes were watching, but, lo and behold, the little fish was still lying on the rock, as if nothing had happened.

The little fish had managed to withstand the waves.

The waves went rolling in one after the other, getting higher and higher.

The water became turbid with sand, shingle and bunches of seaweed. It was difficult to make out what was on top of the rock.

When the waters became quiet the fishes could see the little green fish still lying on the rock as if glued to it.

They watched the little fish for a long time in their amazement. Then they began to ask one another what kind of fish it was and where it had come from.

The crooked-legged crab crawled out from under his stone when he heard all the commotion, looked at the little fish with his eyes open wide, and said, “Some wonder you’ve found yourselves. That’s our Cornish sucker. It always attaches itself to the rock with its suction pad and lies there. Go and pull it off the rock!”

The crab was very, very old and knew everything, so nothing could surprise him.



THE PLAICE AND THE GILTHEAD

Long, long ago the plaice was a fish just like other fishes. Her eyes were in the sides of her head, her mouth was straight, and she swam with her back upwards just like all other fishes. Just listen to what happened to her.

One day the plaice happened to meet a gilthead on the seabed by a big green rock.

The gilthead began to complain to the plaice about his ill-luck.

The dolphin had been chasing a red mullet. The gilthead swam in front of the dolphin and so the dolphin started chasing him instead.

The fishes all got together to hold their council. While the gilthead was escaping from the dolphin, he was late for the council. So, he got a dressing down.

The haddocks were fighting in the seaweed when the gilthead swam by. He just had to stick his nose in, get mixed up in the fight and he got the worst of it!

The plaice listened to the gilthead and thought to herself, "It's your own fault, you mischievous creature, you ask for it all the time. As for me, I never get into trouble!"

They both saw a worm, a really long one. What a tasty morsel that would make.

The gilthead didn't even have time to open his mouth before the plaice said, "Keep away, don't you dare touch it. I'll share it up!" and began tearing the worm to pieces.

The gilthead watched her, licking his lips. It was a fine juicy worm.

"Do you know what," said the plaice cunningly, "this worm's a bit too big for us really. Let's share it with someone else as well. Go and get the scorpion fish!"

The gilthead was rather surprised. Since when had the plaice begun to share her catch with others? But he didn't argue. If she said there was enough for three of them, then there must be. So, he hurried off to find the scorpion fish.

The plaice was left with the worm. She swallowed one piece of it, then another. But she saw that she couldn't eat it all at once.

"I'll put some away for another day," she thought. She decided to bury the worm under a rock.

She began to dig up the sand with her snout, using her fins and her tail to throw the sand away.

The plaice dug under the rock for some time and then dragged the worm into the hole.

She swam away a bit and looked at the rock from a distance. "It's no good.

They'll find the worm, if I don't hide it deeper down," thought the plaice.

The plaice heard the gilthead and the scorpion fish hurrying towards the rock. She was afraid she would not have the time to hide the worm and dived under the rock quickly. She tried to dig an even deeper hole.

The gilthead and the scorpion fish were very near to the rock by then. The plaice began to panic and hurried and scurried about under the rock. The rock tottered, inclined slightly and then fell, squashing the plaice.

The fishes came hurrying up. They saw the rock lying on its side and someone's tail poking out from under the rock.

They pulled and pulled the tail and eventually they pulled it out, but they didn't recognise the fish that it belonged to.

What kind of fish was it? It didn't have a back or a belly, just one left side. The rock had flattened the plaice out and made it a different shape. Its eyes and mouth and even back were all on its left side now.

The plaice lay there, trying to open her squashed mouth, but she couldn't say anything. And the worm was gone, too!

The prickly scorpion fish was very angry with the gilthead for making him come such a long way for nothing. It set about chasing the deceiver trying to catch hold of its spines. The gilthead only just managed to save his tail. And that was the end of the affair.

After that, the plaice always remained flattened out into a different shape. Her children, the little plaice, are also born like that.

And that's a fine fish for you!

THE LITTLE CRAB'S HOUSE

Once upon a time there lived in the sea a crab, a rather little crab. The crab was only the size of a five-pence piece, with legs like matches and claws like tweezers. When he was very small he lived wherever he could, but when he grew up he started to look for a home for himself.

He crept out into the shallows and minced along by the shore, looking around him. He espied a stone with a crevice in it and crept into the crevice. He fidgeted and fidgeted, but he couldn't get comfortable.

An old, old bullhead with a round head swam by. "You've got a nice house," the bullhead said, "just as if it'd been made to order."

"What do you know about it!" replied the little crab, his feelings somewhat hurt. "What's so nice about it? It's hard as rock and dark and too cramped."

"But what kind of house do you want?" asked the bullhead surprised.

"Oh, I need a house that's soft and roomy, and full of light. How can you possibly understand what I need, you thick-lipped fellow. Swim away before somebody eats you!"

While the bullhead was moving his lips, trying to reply, the little crab crept out of the hole and went away.

It was slippery climbing over the rocks. The water was swirling round them so he had to be careful he didn't get washed away.

"I'll go and look for some place where the water's deeper," he thought. So, he went deeper into the sea, walking along the sand, which was fine and crumbly.

He found a hole in the sand which was soft, light, and roomy.

"Just the very place for me," he thought.

He had just settled into the hole when he saw a big fish swimming over it. It had a long snout with white barbels underneath it and bony lumps on its back. It was a sturgeon.

The little crab hid himself in the sand with fright. He lay there hardly daring to breathe.

The monster fish came closer and closer. It was swimming right along the bottom, groping about on the seabed with its barbels.

It swam to the hole and started to feel around, digging the sand up with its snout.

The little crab was thrown upside down. He took to his heels, racing along the seabed, faster than his legs could carry him.

He hardly managed to make a getaway.

He ran up to a heap of stones and squeezed in between two of them, unable to recover his breath.

He calmed down and looked around him. The stones were strong, not like the crumbly sand.

"Why don't I make my house here," he thought.

True, it wasn't soft, but it was light and there was as much room as he could wish for.

"I'll stay here," he decided.

The little crab began to scrape the weeds off the stones. Suddenly someone rushed at him from above. Snap went its teeth as it rushed by, but it missed the crab. Then it turned round and raced after him again. The little crab tried to escape this small striped dogfish with its narrow back and head, gaping mouth and its tail shaped like a half moon. The little crab swam round the rock with the dogfish chasing him. While the dogfish was making sure its tail got round the rock, the little crab had made a full circle of the rock. He caught sight of a little cavity in the rock and took refuge in it. He hid himself there and sat and waited. The dogfish looked for him under the rock, but when it didn't find him, it swam away.



“Well,” thought the little crab. “I’m not going anywhere from here. Maybe it’s not soft and comfortable and it’s dark in here, but there is at least plenty of room.”

So, he sat down and stretched out his legs.

No sooner had he done so, than a backler skate swam by. It smelt the crab and made straight for the rock.

It swayed in the water like a big leaf. Its body was as flat as a pancake, its tail like a whip, and its mouth full of teeth.

And what is more, it was an extremely cunning creature. It wouldn’t rush about for nothing. It swam up to the rock, lay down on it and started pushing its head into the little cavity.

It thrust half of its head into the cavity, closed its teeth on the crab’s claw and began to drag the little crab out of the cavity.

There was too much room in the cavity, so the little crab had nowhere to dig his heels in, nothing to hold on to.

He felt sure that his end was coming soon. He pulled his claw for all he was worth and at last it broke off.

He tore himself away from the backler skate’s teeth and pressed himself up against the rock as if he were stuck to it.

The skate kept on scratching the stone with its teeth, but it couldn’t reach the crab. So it ate the claw and swam away. Once it had gone, the little crab scuttled sideways towards the beach. Well, at least I’m still alive, and my claw will grow again, he thought as he ran.

At last, the little crab reached the rocks by the shore where it was shallow. No big fishes could possibly get near the rocks.

The bullhead, his neighbour, was there, just as before.

“Hello, grandpa!” said the little crab. The little crab found his old crevice and darted straight into it. It was all right there really, hard and dark and nice and cramped, too! Just as if it has been made specially for the little crab.

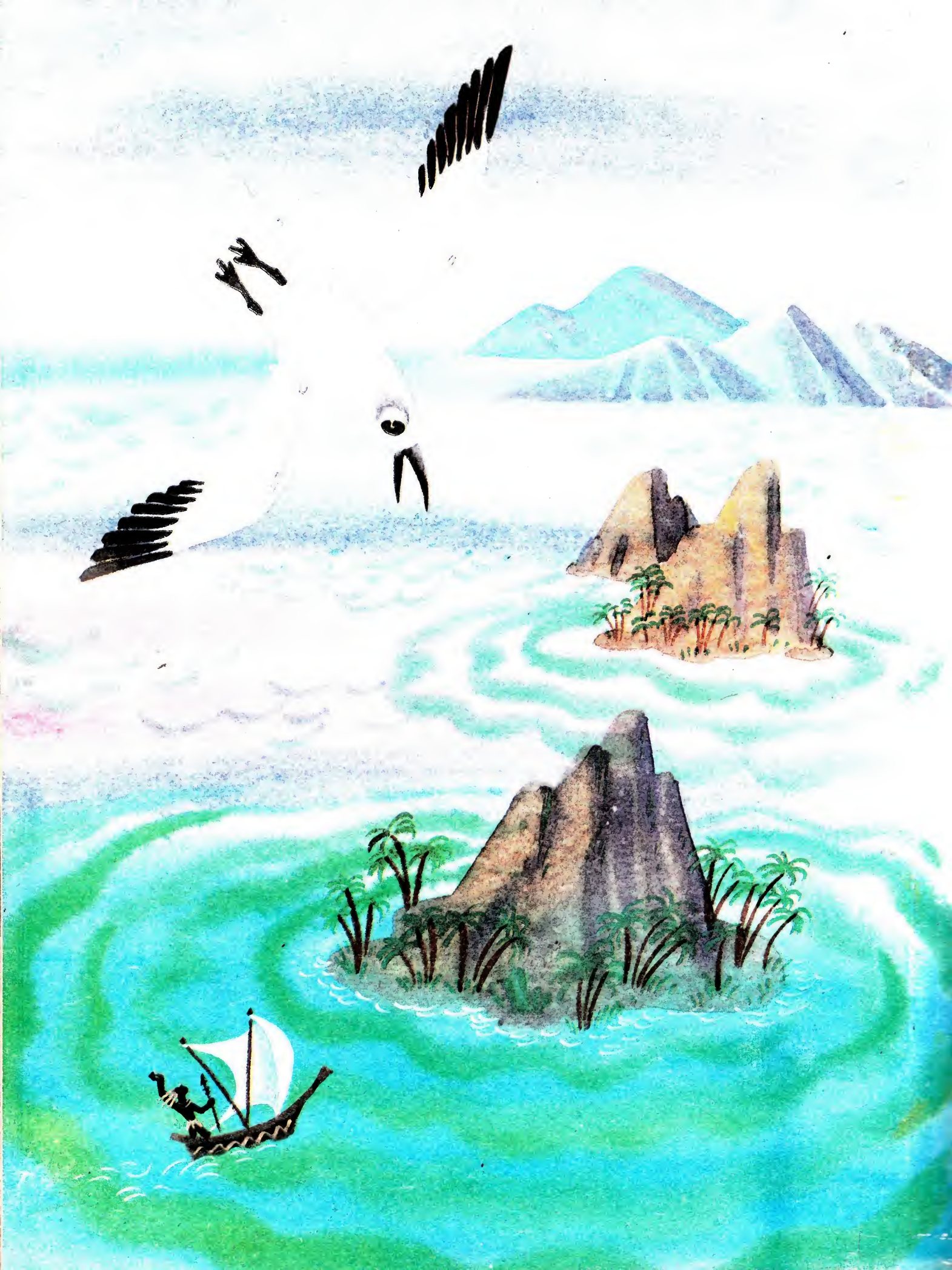
WHY THE PIKE DOESN'T LIVE IN THE SEA

They say that the pike lives in the sea to keep the carp wide awake. That would really seem to be the case, for as soon as the carp stands around gaping, he ends up in the pike's teeth. But in actual fact neither the pike nor the real carp live in the sea. The carp is a freshwater fish, living in rivers and lakes, and so is the pike.

There was a time when the pike got tired of living in the river and it strayed into the sea.

That was the life! In the river or the lake the fish would sit for days on end under a tree that had fallen into the water, all in the dark without moving,





But in the sea there was so much light and so much room. There was no need to lay in wait for your prey. There were plenty of creatures to eat all around, they almost jumped into your mouth...

There was a little worm crawling along the sand. All you had to do was swim up and catch it.

The pike had just swum up to the worm when the sand flew up on all sides. A black fish with a mouth as big as a sack sprang out of the sand. Its large eyes were right on the top of its head. On its head it had a growth, which looked very much like a worm. This was to lure other fishes. They would go for the worm and end up right in the black fish's mouth.

"What a monster!" thought the pike, lashed its tail and disappeared into the seaweed.

It looked around and saw some more prey, as it were coming straight towards it. This time it was a little fish. But there was something strange about the little fish. It was swimming standing up. It had a horse's head and its back was all shaggy and you could see all its ribs in its sides. The little fish looked at the pike, one eye looking one way, and the other, the other way.

When it swam in the brown seaweed it looked brown and when it was in the green seaweed it was green.

"What kind of fish is it? Why do its eyes keep turning from side to side? It must be mad." The pike moved away. "Better let it be. I've never seen anything like that back in the river where there was the carp, the pot-bellied lazy-bones that it was..."

When the pike remembered the fat, tasty carp, his stomach ached with hunger.

So, it hurried forward and soon saw something between the rocks; a rather small fish with thick lips and spots all over it was hiding there.

Now pikes always believe that if something is hiding from you, you must seize it.

The pike seized the spotted fish, but no sooner had it done so, than it saw stars.

The spotted fish had a spine on its back.

This spine went right into the roof of the pike's mouth. The pike could neither swallow the fish nor spit it out. It took the pike a long time to get rid of the spiny fish. As soon as it did, it went back to its own river.

The pike had had enough of the sea, its sea devil with bait on its head to lure its prey, its sea horse, and its scorpion fish with a poisonous spine.

Ever since that time you wouldn't even be able to lure the pike into the sea with a carp.

WHAT COLOUR IS THE SEA?

It all happened one summer, somewhere in the North. The young sea-gulls had got together on the top of a big cliff. They were all sitting there waiting to hear what the old guillemot had to say to them. The old guillemot stood like a pillar, his head pointing upwards, remembering what he had to say. He thought and thought, and then started to speak.

"Today I'm going to tell you about the colour of the sea," began the old guillemot.

"What a lot of nonsense!" exclaimed a young sea-gull. "Everyone knows that the sea is blue, don't they?"

"Oh, very well," agreed the guillemot thoughtfully, "then, I won't tell you about the sea... I'll tell you about Fomka the skua and the villainous way in which he gets his food..."

The sea-gulls were already tired of sitting quietly. Whirr! Flap-flap, they flew away, making a terrible noise...

Winter came, and the fishes descended into the depths of the sea. It became difficult to hunt for them.

One day, the young sea-gull flew around in search of something to eat for five days. He returned to the cliff, but there were no sea-gulls there.

He couldn't understand what was the matter.

He waited and waited for the gulls to return, but only a few guillemots were circling round near the cliff.

The sea-gull flew up to them and saw the old guillemot among them.

He had forgotten how he'd been rude to the old guillemot back in the summer.

"Can you tell me where the sea-gulls have flown to?"

The old guillemot fell to thinking as was his custom.

"They've gone south," said the old guillemot, after thinking for a moment. "Your flock has flown south."

"What shall I do now then? How shall I catch them up?" asked the young sea-gull.

"Fly to where the sun shines at midday. When the sea changes colour three times, you will catch up with your flock," the old guillemot advised him.

The sea-gull sprang off the cliff and flashed below amidst the specks of white foam. His only thought was to go south as quickly as possible.

One day went by, then another. The sea-gull kept on flying, but the sea below him was sometimes darker, sometimes lighter, but always blue.

"Perhaps the old guillemot made a mistake? May be I shall never see my flock again?" thought the sea-gull.

But what was that up ahead? A yellow strip flashed in front of him. It

came closer and closer until the water beneath him was really yellow. A big river flowed into the sea here and coloured the water with the clay and sand from its banks. The sea had changed its colour for the first time.

Once again the waters beneath him became blue. The sea-gull spotted a shoal of herrings. He dived into the water and caught one. Food at last!

Suddenly he heard the flapping of big wings above his head. Look out, there was Fomka the skua.

The sea-gull dropped the herring, and Fomka caught it and swallowed it.

The skua followed the sea-gull all the time, and the sea-gull just could not get rid of it. Where the sea-gull went, Fomka went, too, swooping down on him and seizing his food from his beak.

The sea-gull only managed to get away from it at night.

Now he had reached some mountains. It was very hot there. Below him a gulf curved like a snake, and in the gulf the water was red.

The sea-gull swooped down towards the gulf. The water was teeming with tiny red worms. So, the sea had changed colour a second time.

The sea-gull no longer had the strength to fly on.

Ahead of him he saw islands with lush green vegetation. Hundreds of birds were hovering over them. This looked like a good place to stop.

The sea-gull flew lower and lower. He closed his eyes and, when he opened them, the water around the islands was green.

The water was full of little balls of seaweed, floating in it like fish spawn. The sea had become green like the tundra, his homeland, in spring.

So, the sea had changed colour for the third time.

There was his flock, flying all around, hurrying to welcome him.

Six months passed, and in summer the sea-gulls returned to the North. The big cliff again became white with birds. One day the sea-gull flew down into a crowd of young gulls who were resting after their long journey and listening to the tales of the worldly-wise birds.

"Would you like me to tell you what colour the sea is?" began the sea-gull.

"What nonsense!" said the youngest gull loudly. "Everyone knows that the sea is blue, don't they?..."



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